



## Bob Kerr: From one side of recovery to the other

01:00 AM EDT on Friday, September 8, 2006

Lori Dorsey has three sets of letters after her name, a job she loves and a husband who understands what she does.

The odds against pulling off this personal trifecta would have been off the charts 25 years ago, when Dorsey was a "mess."

That's her word. She is unsparing in laying out the painful path of her addictions.

"It got pretty bizarre," she said yesterday in her office at the state Division of Behavioral Healthcare Services in Cranston. "I once called the CIA and told them they should hire me."

Some of it's almost funny. It always is. Drugs and drinking can make for some zany, madcap moments. If those moments weren't signs of a life spinning out of control they might be fall-on-the-floor hilarious.

There was a time when Dorsey was taking 65 pills a day. From her mid-20s to her early 30s, she was in and out of hospitals as the result of a serious back injury. She developed a heavy addiction to prescription drugs. She combined that with a drinking problem she had failed to recognize. She dabbled in cocaine. She was trying to raise two children.

Thus, the mess. Because of it, because she cleaned it up, she will be at the corner of Steeple and Canal streets Saturday, Sept. 16, to join a bunch of people in a pretty unusual celebration. They will celebrate what Dorsey celebrates every day -- recovery and the pursuit of it.

It is part of National Recovery Month, and it will include an art display and a candlelight vigil to recognize those working toward recovery and those who died from their addictions. There will be information booths and entertainment and a "Tree of Life" on which people can put their first name and the date on which they started toward recovery.

"We want to show the world how many of us there are," said Dorsey.

She is 52 and will mark 19 years of sobriety in February. She met a doctor in a recovery program who told her to get off the pills or go insane. The same doctor took her to a 12-step program. She spent 37 days in High Point. And she had days and days of flat out physical misery, of cramps and diarrhea. There were panic attacks and depression.

Her parents were there for her through all of it. There's no way she'd have made it without them.

She went back to school, and took it seriously for the first time. Her kids helped her with math.

She went to the Community College of Rhode Island in Warwick where the teachers were extremely understanding and where one of them told her she'd get a master's degree someday.

She got the master's degree in social work from Rhode Island College where she would sometimes lie on the floor during classes because of the pain that persisted into her recovery.

Now, she is Senior Public Health Promotion Specialist in Substance Abuse Treatment Services in the Department of Mental Health Retardation and Hospitals. It is a long title for a job that, simply stated, involves making treatment better for everyone involved. She brings to it professional training and invaluable personal experience.

"A lot of people think addiction is a moral issue," she said. "But it can happen to anybody."

She is surrounded by people who are all about recovery. Some have followed a similarly hard road to their careers.

Seven years ago, she married David Dorsey, a clinical supervisor.

"He's as dedicated to this as I am."

A good life has followed a very hard one. The addict still informs the social worker. Lori Dorsey says she has to stay on top of herself every day.

[bkerr@projjo.com](mailto:bkerr@projjo.com) / (401) 277-7252

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